

Minutes of the Human Rights Commission meeting
April 20, 2022

Present: Wren Bellavance-Grace, Booker Bush, Deidre Cuffee-Gray, Chelsea Sunday Kline, Susan McDonald-Bolanos, Megan Paik, Kathy Wicks

Meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m. There was no public comment.

The commissioners introduced themselves to new member, Chelsea Sunday Kline. Commissioner Kline is also a new executive director of Cancer Connections, which focuses on caregiving and healthcare access. Reproductive justice and social justice have been main threads of her activism and organizing.

The March 2022 minutes were unanimously approved.

Housing as a Human Right 2022 programs

A conversation with Lisa Downing affirmed the Forbes Library's interest in co-sponsoring another event before the end of the year. Many ideas were generated from the planning sessions prior to the February event; speakers were ultimately chosen based on their availability. Presently, commissioners would like to collaborate with Sean Donovan, Implementation Director of the Dept of Community Care. He may be invited to speak at a HRC meeting and to co-write a Gazette column to highlight the ongoing need for shelter in the warmer months. A book related to houselessness could be suggested as a community read. Future events could focus on the new refugee population, evictions with the end of emergency assistance funds, or following up to the calls to action in the February event. Gwen Nabad, visiting HRC as the newest member of the Northampton Housing Partnership, offered a perspective from that board. NHP was invited again to collaborate with HRC on the event series.

Select Committee for the Study of Barriers to Service on Boards and Commissions

The Council is accepting applications for this committee which will include two elected/nonelected officials, three currently serving on boards/commissions, and two residents who are not serving/have never served. In the past years, HRC has referenced many topics relevant to the charge of the committee and has been asked to nominate one member to serve on the select committee, which is likely to run at least six months and meet several times monthly. Previous guests Clarke Bankert and Talya Sogoba of Collaborative for Educational Services have provided substantial input to the design of this committee, which will be staffed and possibly compensate members. Commissioners Macdonald-Bolanos and Bellavance-Grace both expressed interest in applying on behalf of the HRC, and they will explore the possibility of sharing one position on the select committee, barring conflict with Robert's Rules. This is an

opportunity to incorporate the underrepresented voices of youth residents. Greenfield city council also is considering a resolution to form a similar select committee.

Northampton Rally for a More Accessible City

Jeremy Macomber-Dubs, chair of the Disability Commission, is one of the organizers. The event was ignited when a new dispensary blocked the accessibility of the entrance of an adjoining music venue. A list of demands from the Disablist Movement was shared. The event aspires to educate and raise community awareness and support from other businesses. Commissioner Kline will make the statement at the rally:

“Human Rights Commission has always looked to advance the right to access for all and to support ongoing work to be done to expand access in the city.”

Order for Special Legislation to Prohibit...Brokers’ Commissions to be Paid by...Prospective Tenant

Transferring rental agency fees, which may be as high as 60-70 percent of one month’s rent, from prospective tenants to landlords was an idea recommended by the Unlocking Opportunity study as well as Ordinance Review Committee of 2020. Two-thirds of Northampton landlords surveyed in the study use rental agencies to market rental units and to screen applicants. Commissioners Paik and Wicks will attend the public forum and deliver the statement:

"The Northampton Human Rights Commission has chosen housing as a human right as a prime focus of our work this year. We see brokers fees which are paid by tenants as a major barrier to accessing housing. We support this policy proposal to end brokers fees paid by prospective tenants or tenants."

Building Alternatives to Police Response

Commissioner Cuffey-Gray has been attending this biweekly online series sponsored by AFSC. A call to action is to map the existing alternatives within the participant’s communities. She intends to reach out to local folx involved in seeking alternatives.

New Business

Commissioners may consider ways to support for Ukrainian-American residents and refugees in the area in future months. A Right to Be (formerly Hollaback!) training may be proposed to the Council after the budget season.

Commissioner Paik moved to adjourn and was seconded by Commissioner Wicks. Meeting ended at 8:02 p.m.